

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

BEHAVIOUR

Morris, Desmond. *The Naked Ape*. London, 1967. Cape. Pp. 252. Price 30s.

WHY SHOULD A WRITER choose this title for a book concerning the Human Species? Dr. Morris answers the question himself when he warns that "we must take a long look at ourselves as biological specimens and gain some understanding of our limitations".

The subject is mainly the ethology of man and it is described in the absorbing manner which one would expect from the writer's published range of interests—he has written a book on *The Biology of Art* and has edited a standard text on primate ethology.

After having read this book it is difficult to decide whether man is to be congratulated on having retained so much of his original nature, or the other members of the primates for having been sensible enough not to have developed in the way that humans have.

Dr. Morris's theme is deadly serious and yet he uses a light touch to transmit his message not despising the near pun to press a point home.

The book is intended for the general reader and, therefore, perhaps one should not expect the references that would be chosen in a book for specialists. On the other hand one wishes that the writer would make clear the passages in which he is stating an observed fact and others in which he makes an interesting deduction without the presentation of adequate background. How, for instance, does he justify the unsupported statement that an artificial waking device (presumably an alarm clock) should be unnecessary—and that those who need such an aid suffer from reduced alertness?

An interesting passage refers to stereotypes in the situation of extreme boredom: for example the pacing to and fro of caged animals and the aimless nodding of the head of the confined elephant—and one could add—the apparently purposeless thumb sucking by infants.

Perhaps he tends to be too attracted by neologisms and sometimes they are illogically formed. Thus he claims that in all exploratory behaviour there is a conflict between neophilic and neophobic images which implies new attractions and new dislikes rather than the antithesis he wishes to make between desire for new things and concurrent dislike or fear of those things.

However, it is in the description of the background of our aggressive urges that our future is most alarmingly displayed; in his view due to those unbridled and misdirected energies there is a strong chance that we shall have eliminated ourselves by the end of the century—and who looking at the meaningless and purposeless aggressive activities in which we indulge can say that the chances of such a catastrophe (from our point of view) are not indeed great?

The production of more and more efficient and impersonal means of destruction of human life; the continuous and potentially calamitous increase in the birth rate; these are self-evident examples of the lack of perspective and of foresight in which we are deficient.

This book supplies a salutary new viewpoint for most of us (if we need it) of the problems and given the goodwill the means to prevent disaster.

A list of references is given, together with a bibliography, but most regrettably no index is provided.

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